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Book Reviews

Ashley Kim Stewart*

Marcus Power, Giles Mohan and May Tan-Mullins - *China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa: Powering Development?*

Timothy M. Shaw (ed.): International Political Economy Series, published 17 July 2012, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 352 pages, ISBN: 978-0-230-22912-9.

Since the redoubled interest that China has shown in cultivating its relations with African nations, there have also been extensive and long-running debates about its aims and motivations, some of which have been quite heated and even, at times, vitriolic. *China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa: Powering Development?* contributes to these current discussions and debates in the – often somewhat murky – field of Sino-African relations, by continuing the trend of arguing that a more-nuanced view of Chinese engagement in Africa than that which has been offered in IR until relatively recently is necessary.

In this broad-scoped book, which seeks to use a novel approach in studying China-Africa relations, Power, Mohan and Tan-Mullins state that they intend to use representations of negative views of China in Africa “as a springboard to explore a number of important issues that [they] feel are vital in analysing the complex and changing relationships between China and Africa ... to factor in the rise of China in the context of major geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts ... [create] a disaggregated analysis of China-Africa relations ... [and] to reinsert

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African agency into the picture” (pp. 8-9). In doing so, they unlock another side of the gradually-expanding awareness in IR of a need to rethink current interpretations in the wake of the global financial crisis and transforming global economy, including the materialisation of so-called ‘rising powers’ or ‘emerging actors’.

The volume, which uses Angola and Ghana as comprehensive case-studies throughout, starts out by contextualising the conventional discourse surrounding China-Africa relations, and gives a broad overview of the mercantile, cultural and migratory facets of their lengthy history over two millennia and into that of the more-modern aid and development aspects, with their corresponding constructed narratives. In the opening chapters there is also a more-detailed analysis of the African repercussions of Chinese policies in various industries, sectors, and projects – including a useful comparative breakdown and summary of the four Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) action-plans. Afterwards there is an exploration of the development of Chinese-African trade and markets partially due to the expansion and restructuring of the Chinese economy and its international investments (including its significant policy of supporting state-owned enterprises abroad), and then an inclusive debate of to what extent China – especially because of its socialist elements – may be described as neoliberal.

This is followed in the second half of *China’s Resource Diplomacy in Africa* by examining Sino-African development cooperation, comparing and contrasting it (and the various responses to it on two levels) with ‘traditional’ aid to Africa along historical, modality, strategic and structural lines, before scrutinising the political economy of these relationships, looking at the impact of Chinese engagement in Africa on institutions such as governance and stability, and the civil-society and media responses to it. The book later turns to environmental

concerns about the Chinese presence in Africa, and looks at both the abundance of anaemic African policy-milieus and Chinese businesses' increasing awareness of – though not necessarily compliance with – corporate social responsibility. Finally, the authors consider China's approach to Africa in a geopolitical context: analysing China's past and contemporary use of 'soft power', cataloguing states and organisations currently engaging with Africa, teasing out the array of Chinese foreign policy actors, and recent policy developments.

China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa weaves elements of political economy, political ecology, neoliberalism, postcolonialism, globalisation, geopolitics, and IR and critical IR theories in a very interesting way into what the authors call a 'postcolonial geopolitical economy' approach to study the mounting interactions between Chinese and African governments, economic, corporate and development sectors, and the implications of these interactions, including on governance, the environment, and African civil-society. This extremely timeously-published book comes at a stage when the international order is being restructured; traditionally-dominant economies have undergone adjustments and restrictions necessitated by the global financial crisis and its aftermath, while many emerging economies – including those in Africa and Asia – not only seem to have gotten through the crisis comparatively unscathed but are positively thriving, experiencing faster growth-rates than ever. This makes a creative and novel analysis, such as the one in this book, of the qualities and growing scales of these transformations and their consequences especially important in working towards building a conceptualisation that incorporates and explains these changes and predicts likely outcomes. One point that the book states that it intends to make but does not quite achieve, is to answer a question it initially poses: the complex issue of *how* the current understanding of international

development should be transformed in light of the rise of China, except to say that it should be more-nuanced. While it is rapidly becoming a consensus in some spheres of the Sino-African relations domain that this needs to be done, this book may not contribute directly to the (likely to be long and difficult) task of fostering a comprehensively reformed re-construction of current IR interpretations of China's – and also those of other emerging actors – dealings in and with Africa.

The volume takes a wide-ranging approach, looking at the Sino-African relationship on many levels and from a variety of perspectives, which makes for a broad and comprehensive analysis and a more-balanced view. It is illustrated throughout by photographs of the range of the Chinese presence in projects and commerce in various African countries, and also deftly by images of fascinating Chinese propaganda-posters on China-Africa relations and interactions from the Stefan R. Landsberger collection, which offer thought-provoking insights into the perspectives that the Chinese government would like their citizens and those of other nations to have about their international interactions with Africa.

Marcus Power, Giles Mohan and May Tan-Mullins' well-written *China's Resource Diplomacy in Africa* will be of particular interest to China-Africa scholars and recognised as a valuable contribution to the discipline, presenting an excellent exploration of and deepening awareness about the nature and scope of Chinese interests in Africa and contextualising the concerns that have been raised about them.